

FEBRUARY 18, 2026 FATHER HENK VAN MEIJEL

As we enter the season of Lent, the focus again, like every year, we focus on, again, on ourselves and on our own relationship with God. And we often forget that we have a public prayer life, and a private prayer life. And, of course, in the public prayer life, we are here together, at this celebration, we are seen by others. And but the most important thing is the private prayer life. And not to be, uh, how our relationship is with others.

Sometimes people come to me, and they say, "Oh, I just want to be like that other person in church, who looks so pious." But, it's just from the outside. We don't know what's happening in a person. And so, to emulate someone else, who's really pious, might not be the right thing. It is in our own prayer life, in our own relationship with God, where the real stuff happens.

And, of course, Lent is a time of looking inward. What areas of my life need attention? Where do I have to grow in God, if I have to grow in God? And fasting is one of the ways of controlling our passions.

Gerald May, a very well known author, who wrote the classic *Addiction and Grace*, he says every human being has an addiction. And it's coming in touch with it. Matter of fact, I do a lot of work with addictions, and I sometimes jokingly say I don't have an addiction, but give me my coffee in the morning, otherwise it's not going to be good. So, we all have something, and it is good to look at it.

And fasting is not like fish on Friday. I think it's the great joke in the Church, especially on Friday, give me some nice, deep-fried fish and chips. I love it. Am I fasting here? No, not at all. But it is looking deeper. What areas? And especially in our society, in our current society, fasting

can also be fasting on electronic. On electronics. Fasting on social media.

So many of us are stuck in social media, while they neglect the people right around us. The people right around us, they become far away, and the people who are far away, become close, because of the social media. And it really breaks down a lot of relationships. So that might be an area to say, Hey, instead of spending three hours on social media every day, I just go down to one hour. Let me just make it one hour, and literally set an alarm clock on your phone and I will try one hour. To try to rein that in.

Of course the same thing is with smoking. Not too many people smoke anymore, but if someone has a real habit of smoking, say a pack a day, try to cut it down. Try to work at it. It's not cold turkey, it does not usually work. Well, it works for some people, but it doesn't always work. And then, of course, so many people are stuck in the shopping. The secular world, the malls have become the church of today. And to rein that in. Am I really always looking for the latest gadgets? How much influence do the media have on me, on my shopping patterns? What can I do to rein that in?

And it's about self-control. And self-control, it is so important, because if we can control in those kind of areas, then we also can control in the big battle with the devil. The spiritual battle. He spiritual battle which is continuously going on, and saying, Hey, why don't you go to the mall, and make yourself happy, that's going to make you happy? Which only is going to last for about a week or so, and then you've gotta buy some more if it isn't-- maybe it's only two days.

But it is really looking inward, and how are we going to go about it. In our opening prayer, or Collect, is says: "As we take up the battle against

spiritual evils, we may be armed with weapons of self-restraint." And the self-restraint is really at the bottom of our Lenten season.

So, as we also can accept our battles in life, our struggles in life, in our families and so on. If I can restrain myself on certain things, I also might be able to put up with, in my case, with community members who drive me crazy. But also in a family, certain members in our family who drive us cuckoo all the time with the same habits, I can restrain myself better.

The more I can do that, the more I also become a sign of God. A sign for others who wants to build a better world. And it's all so simple, but it does not-- it's not easy to do it.

And in our second reading, 2 Corinthians, Saint Paul right starts off at the first line: "We are ambassadors of Christ." And to be ambassadors of Christ, those who evangelize, it is about that self-restraint, and being good to others. And it's as simple as that. But it's not an easy battle.

And so there we are, in Lent, as we start this journey. Amen.